

be discussed and debated. We look forward to that debate and discussion as well tomorrow.

At least now, we have no further speakers on this legislation at this time. I see our friend from Iowa on his feet.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. GRASSLEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 3014 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

SURVIVAL OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, about a month ago on my Web site, which is sanders.senate.gov, I requested that Vermonters e-mail me about what the collapse of the middle class means to them personally—not in esoteric economic terms but in a sense of what they are going through.

Frankly, we are a small State, and our people are pretty reticent. People in Vermont don't like to open up and tell everybody all of the problems they have. They try to keep it to themselves. We expected that we would receive perhaps a few dozen replies. In fact, over the last month, we have received some 700 e-mails that came into my office talking about how people in the middle class today are trying desperately to survive. About 90 percent of the e-mails came from the State of Vermont. We have had a number from around the rest of the country.

I sometimes think that many of our colleagues here really don't have much of a clue about what is going on in the real world. It is no great secret that the Halls of Congress are filled with lobbyists who make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year representing the energy companies, the coal companies, the oil companies, the drug companies, the insurance companies, the banks, and the credit card companies. They are all over the place, and they try to influence—and are successful in many instances—in influencing Congress to pass legislation that protects the interests of multinational corporations or the wealthiest people in this country. It is far too rare that we hear the pain

and the reality of life that is going on among ordinary people, especially people who come from a rural State such as mine.

What I wish to do is spend most of my time doing nothing more than just reading to my colleagues and for the American people some of the reality that takes place in a small, rural State which I think is not radically different from what is taking place today all over this country. All of these are verbatim e-mails that I received from families in the State of Vermont. Let me begin by reading one which says:

I make less than \$35,000 a year and work hard to earn it. I am trying to get by with rising costs of fuel. I have a wife and four kids that I love dearly and I am trying to do the best that I can for them. With the cost of gas pushing \$4 a gallon and the price of heating oil up to over \$4 a gallon, it is hard to make ends meet. On top of that, the furnace that heats the house and keeps my kids warm died today, and while it will not need to run much longer, the nights are still too cold for a 3-year-old. I am not sure how I am going to pay for the repairs. I never thought that I would be classified as poor having grown up in an upper middle class family, but that is where I am now. I don't know what we need to do, but I know we need to do something before the middle class is a thing of the past.

As I read these stories, what you are going to hear today in the year 2008 is that children are going cold in America, and we have to understand that. This is one example. I will read more. Anyone who thinks it is not true doesn't know what is going on in the real world. Here is another e-mail that I received:

I am a teacher with 20 years of experience, and I have a master's degree. As a single parent, I am struggling every day to put food on the table.

This is a teacher with a masters degree.

Our clothes all come from thrift stores. I have a 5-year-old car that needs work. My son is gifted and talented. I tried to sell my house to enroll him in a school that had curriculum available for his special needs. After two years on the market, my house never sold. The property taxes have nearly doubled in 10 years, and the price of heating oil is prohibitive. To meet the needs of my son, I let the house sit and moved into an apartment near his high school. I don't go to church many Sundays because the gasoline is too expensive to drive there.

Now, I wonder how many people all over this country are facing that same reality. I will read right from her letter:

I don't go to church many Sundays because the gasoline is too expensive to drive there.

Every thought of an activity is dependent on the cost. I can only purchase food from dented can stores. I don't know how I can continue this way for two more years of my son's high school; yet, I am trying to meet his academic and psychological needs. I know that I will never be able to retire on a teacher's retirement with no insurance. I am stretched to the breaking point, with no help in sight.

That is a teacher with a master's degree. This is not somebody who is unemployed, who never graduated high school. This is solid middle class. This is her reality.

Here is another story:

My wife and I live in rural Vermont. We own a home and make about \$75,000 a year combined.

That is, in Vermont, not a bad income.

We own two vehicles and travel about 74 miles a day roundtrip to get to our jobs. Not only is the price of gas killing us, I have been displaced from two jobs in the last nine years due to the exportation of jobs overseas. My current job is in jeopardy of being downsized due to the economy. Every job I have had since I moved here in 1999 has paid less, with less benefits. We are spending our life savings just to make ends meet.

When you read these stories, you hear recurring themes: The price of gas and people losing jobs due to outsourcing. Over and over again, these themes appear. I want to reiterate that these are not "poor" people, homeless people, people without any education. These are people who once considered themselves to be part of the American middle class. Similar to millions and millions of other people, that middle-class life is rapidly disappearing.

Here is another one:

I work full-time at the largest hospital in Vermont. I am in more debt now than I was 10 years ago as a single mother going full time to college and waitressing to make ends meet. When is something going to be done to lower gas prices, which have exponentially raised the cost of everything? I would love to just tell my children, "Yes, we can go out to the movies" and not have it break the bank.

In other words, what you are seeing all over this country is for people who take a ride to church or go to the movies, they can no longer perform these basic joys of life because they cannot afford to do that anymore.

Here is another letter:

My husband and I have lived in Vermont our whole lives. We have two small children (a baby and a toddler) and felt fortunate to own our own house and land, but due to the increasing fuel prices we have at times had to choose between baby food, diapers, and heating fuel. We've run out of heating fuel 3 times so far, and the baby has ended up in the hospital with pneumonia 2 of the times. We try to keep the kids warm with an electric space heater on those nights, but that just doesn't do the trick.

My husband does what he can just to scrape enough money for car fuel each week, and we've gone from 3 vehicles to 1 just to try and get by without going further into debt. We were going to sell the house and rent, but the rent around here is higher than what we pay for our monthly mortgage and property taxes combined. Please help.

This is the story in America in 2008—a family not having enough heat and their child getting pneumonia. This is the United States of America in 2008. She asks, "Please help." Well, let's help.

This is from north central Vermont:

Due to illness, my ability to work has been severely limited. I am making \$10 an hour and if I am lucky, I get 35 hours a week of work. At this time, I am only getting 20 hours as it is "off season" in Stowe.

That is a major recreation area in Vermont.

It does not take a mathematician to do the figures. How are my wife and I supposed to